saints --in-- christ Jesus

Thrust Statement: **Every Christian stands apart and is unique and is separated from the world.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:1-3**

> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Paul begins this epistle with: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus" (**Ephesians 1:1**).[1] The apostle Paul gives a description of every believer. This passage is important in that it immediately calls attention to the Christian's status_"saints." Christians are rather reluctant to utilize the word *saint* in their description of themselves. The word *saint* is normally associated with someone who has been canonized by a religious organization. One often visualizes a saint as an individual who is extremely devout with a halo about his/her head. But Paul does not employ the word *saint* in that sense.

God's people are accustomed to saying, "I am a Christian," but they are afraid to say, "I am a saint." This confusion is over a misunderstanding of the word *saint*. For Paul, a saint is one who is separated from the world to God. In other words, a saint is one who is set apart for the service of God. Every Christian is taken out of the world and is given uniqueness by God. It is in this vein that Peter writes:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people,

> but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**1 Peter 2:9-10**).

The Christians at Oakwood Hills' church[2] are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." This is Peter's definition of Christians. In one sense they were a people among other people and yet they were different. This term is used to describe one who has put his/her trust in Jesus Christ. Every Christian is in the world physically, but not of the world spiritually. Saints are individuals who are set apart by God. In other words, the believer is one who is segregated from the world to serve God. God is the One who sanctifies; God is the One who sets apart; God is the One who justifies. Paul in his letter to the Galatians says essentially the same thing about God's role in our separation.

> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (**Galatians 1:3-5**).

Every Christian is delivered out of the world; every Christian is separated from the world. The saint is someone who has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. In the Colossian letter, Paul captures the very essence of forgiveness: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (**Colossians 1:13-14**). Sin separates from God. Isaiah thundered this note of alarm to the children of Israel: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God" (**Isaiah 59:2**). Before anyone can be separated FOR God, he or she must be cleansed from the guilt of sin.

John the apostle, in the Book of Revelation, calls attention to the way sins are cleansed: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests <u>to serve</u> his God and Father_to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (**Revelation 1:5-6**). Peter also calls attention to this cleansing by the blood of Christ: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

But this cleansing does not abrogate the need for obedience to the gospel of God. It is still necessary to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with <u>your mind</u>; It is still necessary to love your neighbor as yourself. Every Christian must present himself or herself as a living sacrifice to God. Listen to Paul as he encourages the believers in Rome to put into practice holy living:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God_this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of <u>your mind</u>. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is_his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Peter also reminds the Christians scattered throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (**1 Peter 1:1**) to practice holiness as their way of life:

> Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (**1:13-16**).

Every Christian is a saint; you cannot be a Christian without being a saint. You cannot be a Christian and not be alienated from the world in some far-reaching sense. There is a severance that has taken place in your mind, in your outlook, in your heart, in your conversation, and in your behavior. Is there a change in your way of life? Is there a change in the way you think? Is there a change in your conversation? Is there a change in the way you treat other people? Is there a change in the way you treat your wife? Is there a change in the way you treat your husband? Is there a change in the way you treat your children? Is there a change in the way you think? Paul reminds the Christians at Colossae:

> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (**Colossians 3:1-4**).

Paul is telling the Colossians that not only must they SEEK heaven, but they must also THINK heaven. Where is your mind? Is it upon worldly things? Or is it upon spiritual things? This is very similar to the words of Jesus: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it:Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (**Matthew 22:37-40**). How do you measure up to this admonition of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind? If you love God this way, there will be a change in your total behavior. One cannot live a life of sin and expect to inherit the kingdom of God. Paul writes forcefully to the churches in the province of Galatia to avoid sinful behavior:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**Galatians 5:19-21**).

Are you guilty of the works of the flesh? Are you guilty of "drunkenness"? Are you guilty of "fits of rage"? Are you guilty of "sexual immorality"? Are you guilty of "selfish ambition"? If so, then you must repent of these sins and serve God. In this same epistle, Paul enumerates ethical behavior that is in harmony with the Holy Spirit:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**5:22-26**).

Paul also wrote to the Colossians about ethical behavior. In fact, he encourages them to clothe themselves with the following characteristics:

> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (**Colossians 3:12-14**).

Have you "put on love" that brings all things into unqualified harmony. Are you a Christian who feels rather hopeless about a husband or wife or child or some other relative? Do you feel there is no hope for these individuals? Do you remember the saints in Ephesus? Do you remember the saints in Corinth? Do you remember the saints in Galatia? One should never forget that the gospel is the power of God. It has accomplished many things and is still doing so. The words of Paul to the Corinthians are quite informative as to the effectiveness of God's gospel.

> Do you not realise that people who do evil will never inherit the kingdom of God? Make no mistake_the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, the self-indulgent, sodomites, thieves, misers, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers, none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you used to be of that kind: but you have been washed clean, you have been sanctified, and you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**).

Has your conversion to Jesus Christ made a difference in your walk with God? If Paul had written to the church here at Oakwood Hills, he would have written, as he did to the Corinthians: "to the church of God in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, to those who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus and called to be God's holy people, with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord as well as ours. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (**1 Corinthians 1:2-3**). May God help each of you to remember the words of Paul to the saints in Rome: "Once you were slaves of sin, but thank God you have given whole-hearted obedience to the pattern of teaching to which you were introduced; and so, being freed from serving sin, you took uprightness as your master" (**Romans 6:17-18**).

As we conclude this message about Saints in Christ Jesus, I would like to encourage everyone to remember the words of Paul to the saints in Philippi:

> Finally, brothers, let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure,

everything that we love and admire_with whatever is good and praiseworthy. Keep doing everything you learnt from me and were told by me and have heard or seen me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (**Philippians 4:8-9**).

Written by:
Dallas Burdette
PO Box 20274
Montgomery, AL 36120
Phone: 334-288-3186

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] For the benefit of the Internet readers, the Oakwood Hills Church is located in DeFuniak Springs, FL. Even though this message is addressed to the saints at Oakwood Hills, nevertheless, this sermon is addressed to all of God's people.